

Nelson House
Yorktown
York County
Virginia

HABS No. VA 58

HABS
VA
100-YORK,
1-

ADDENDUM
FOLLOWS...

PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORIC AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA
District of Virginia

Historic American Buildings Survey

Prepared at Washington Office

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NELSON HOUSE
Yorktown, Virginia

ADDENDUM
FOLLOWS...

Owner: Mrs. Wayne Chatfield-Taylor & others

Date of Erection: c.1750

Architect:

Builder:

Present Condition: Good, restored

Number of Stories: Three

Materials of Construction: Brick, paneled interior

Other Existing Records:

Additional Data:

Author: W. H. Waterman

Date: Dec 29, 1937

Approved: Dec 29, 1937

NELSON HOUSE
Yorktown, York County, Virginia

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Owner: Estate of George Blow

Date of erection: c. 1740

Present condition: Good

Description:

Brick, Flemish bond; two full stories; gable roof, ends treated as pediments; two ridge chimneys with richly moulded caps. Main facade toward river (north), now replaced as entrance front by former rear elevation. North and south fronts four bays, ends three; all sash, except in gable, 9/9 lights; walling brick, an unusual brown color, with rubbed and gauged trim and cut stone features, including keystones, sills, and quoins. North doorway old gauged, cut and moulded pediment type; similar west doorway, modern. Plan—transverse hall with two rooms on either side. Much fine interior woodwork remains, but all marble mantels are replacements of originals.

Thomas T. Waterman

11/7/40

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NELSON HOUSE
Yorktown, York County, Virginia

From a memorandum written to the Superintendent, Colonial National Historical Park, by Charles E. Hatch, Jr., Junior Park Research Technician, on November 6, 1939

Below are assembled a few facts regarding the Nelson House (York Hall). These have been taken from material in the files which is incomplete, and not adequate for preparing a general statement. They are given, however, and may be suggestive of the historical significance of the building as it stands today.

The Nelson House (York Hall), located on Lot 52 of the original survey of the Town of York, is today one of the most interesting and elaborate examples of early eighteenth century town house architecture in Yorktown. It is generally accepted that this building dates from the first half of the eighteenth century although the exact date of construction has not been determined. Benson J. Lossing in his Pictorial Field Book of the Revolution states that it was erected by the first Nelson emigrant, Thomas ("Sootch Tom") Nelson, and is constructed of imported brick. Mrs. Sydney Smith in a booklet, "Old Yorktown and Its History" expresses this view and adds that it was built in 1711 by "Sootch Tom" for his son William. Thomas Nelson Page enlarges on this by repeating a bit of tradition to the effect that Thomas Nelson arranged to have the cornerstone of the building pass through the hands of his infant heir. Despite these statements there is strong opinion that the Nelson House was not built in 1711, and not built by "Scotch Tom," but, rather, that it was erected by William Nelson at a later date, possibly about 1740.

The Nelson House (York Hall) was a Nelson family home for a long period, and of its owners, perhaps, none is more illustrious than Thomas Nelson, Junior, Governor of Virginia. During the latter part of the Siege of Yorktown, Cornwallis used the building as his headquarters, after he had been forced to leave the residence of Secretary Nelson. Cornwallis did not have complete security here, however, for there are embedded in the walls of the building cannon balls that are said to be those fired during the Siege in 1781.

Throughout the nineteenth century the estate remained in the hands of the Nelson family. It was not until after the Civil War that the present wall around the property was erected by William Nelson of Texas. In the early part of the nineteenth century the Nelson House passed into the hands of Joseph Bryan of Richmond and later was purchased by Captain George P. Blow.

In eloquent and glowing terms, Thomas Nelson Page has written a statement concerning the historical nature of the Nelson House:

Memory grows busy as she walks through the lofty rooms and recalls the scenes they have witnessed. Here, in "ye olden tyme," dwelt a race which grew to wealth and power noted even in that age, when the mere lapse of years, opening up the broad wild lands to the westward, and multiplying the slaves, doubled and quadrupled their possessions without care or thought of the owners. Here have been held receptions at which have gathered Grymeses, Digges, Lees, Carters, Randolphs, Burwells, Pages, Byrds, Spottswoods, Harrisons, and all the gay gentry of the Old Dominion. Up the circular stone steps, where now the dust of the street lies thick, blushing, laughing girls have tripped, followed by stately mammas over whose precious heads the old-time "canopies" were held by careful young lovers, or lordly squires whose names were to become as imperishable as the great Declaration they subscribed. Coming down to a later period, a more historical interest attached itself to the mansion. George Mason and Washington and Jefferson have slept here; Cornwallis established his head-quarters here during the last days of the great siege, when his first head-quarters, Secretary Nelson's house, had been shelled to pieces. Lafayette, no longer the boyish adventurer with a mind wild with romantic dreams of the Cid, and chased like a fugitive by his sovereign, but the honored and revered guest of a mighty nation, returning in his old age to witness the greatness of the New World toward which his valor had so much contributed, slept here and added another to the many associations which already surrounded the mansion.

ADDENDUM
FOLLOWS...

York Hall (Nelson House; Capt. George
P. Blow House)
West corner of intersection of State
Route 1005 and Main Street
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Virginia

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PHOTOGRAPHS

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National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20240